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Security Council

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5614th meeting

Tuesday, 26 December 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Al-Bader	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	Denmark	Mr. Faaborg-Andersen
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Mallikourtis
	Japan	Mr. Shinyo
	Peru	Mr. Doig
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Bartho
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Mahiga
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

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06-68299 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Somalia in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mohamed (Somalia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. François Lonseny Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Fall to take a seat at the Council table.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. François Lonseny Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Fall: Since my last briefing to the Security Council in November, the crisis in Somalia has escalated dangerously as the hostilities between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) have now expanded across a 400-kilometre-wide front. The conflict now involves foreign forces and the use of heavy weapons and aircraft. The deteriorating situation in Somalia has no doubt dealt a serious blow to efforts aimed at the early resumption of peace talks. The fighting has also compounded an already serious humanitarian crisis resulting in additional displacement of populations.

On 6 December, 2006, the Security Council adopted resolution 1725 (2006), modifying the arms embargo and authorizing the establishment of a joint Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)/African Union force to protect the Transitional Federal Government in Baidoa. The adoption of the resolution was warmly welcomed by the Transitional Federal Government but rejected by the Union of Islamic Courts, which claimed that it could lead to fighting in the region, adding that the deployment of foreign forces in Somalia was tantamount to an invasion of the country. In any event, neither IGAD nor the African Union has identified potential troop contributors or possible sources of funding for the IGAD Peace Support Mission in Somalia, as authorized by resolution 1725 (2006).

In the days and weeks leading up to the adoption of resolution 1725 (2006), there had been a gradual escalation in war rhetoric and tensions between the two sides. As a result, on 7 December, intermittent clashes began between militiamen loyal to the Islamic Courts and the Transitional Federal Government forces in various locations in the Bay administrative region south of Baidoa. At the same time, the Union of Islamic Courts accused Ethiopia of illegally deploying troops to Somalia in support of the Transitional Federal Government.

On 12 December, Yusuf Mohamed Siyad Indhaade, the Defence Secretary of the Union of Islamic Courts, announced that Ethiopia had seven days to withdraw its forces from Somalia or face a major conflict. On 20 December, heavy fighting broke out in the Bay region and soon spread to the central Galkayo, Hiran and Middle Shabelle administrative regions, where the forces of the Union of Islamic Courts had been confronting those of the warlords of the former Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-terrorism.

After several days of intense fighting, the Transitional Federal Government forces and their allies have taken control of several areas from the Union of Islamic Courts, including the towns of Bandiradley in Galkayo, Beletweyne in Hiran, Bulo-barde in Middle Shebelle, and Burhakaba and Dinsor in the Bay region. According to reports, Transitional Federal Government forces and their allies are now heading towards Jowhar

Other reports suggest that another TFG force is approaching Wanla-weyn in Lower Shabelle. Transitional Federal Government forces are thus reportedly marching towards Mogadishu from at least two directions. However, they are still facing stiff resistance from UIC militias and their allies in several areas. Fighting between the two sides is also continuing in the central Mudug and Galgudud regions of the country. At the same time, the Transitional Federal Government has announced the closure of Somalia's international borders on security grounds and has called on the international community, particularly the neighbouring States, to help enforce that ban.

As the fighting spreads, both sides accuse each other of getting military support from foreign forces. There have been consistent reports of the presence of troops from Ethiopia inside Somalia and their involvement, together with heavy artillery and aircraft, in the fighting on the side of the Transitional Federal Government. Both Mogadishu airport and a military airfield in Baledugle have been subjected to Ethiopian air strikes. Reports have also mentioned the presence of Eritrea on the side of the Union of Islamic Courts, although Eritrea has consistently denied the presence of its troops inside Somalia.

On 23 December, leaders of the Union of Islamic Courts issued a call for jihad against the Ethiopian troops, whom they accused of invading Somalia, and appealed to foreign fighters to join that jihad. The Ethiopian Government, on 24 December, admitted the presence of its combat troops inside Somalia. In an official statement, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared that his country had "taken self-defensive measures and started counter-attacking the aggressive extremist forces of the Islamic Courts and foreign terrorist groups".

Civilians have been caught up in the fighting, with reports of several deaths and injuries. Some 760 war-wounded have been officially registered by the International Committee of the Red Cross in hospitals in southern Somalia. The International Committee of the Red Cross has provided war-wound kits for 1,500 patients and plans to distribute additional kits in Baidoa and Mogadishu, subject to security guarantees by the Transitional Federal Government.

The outbreak of fighting has severely undermined the provision of relief assistance to two million conflict- and flood-affected people in south-central Somalia. All United Nations and non-governmental organization international staff have been evacuated, including the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team, which was deployed in response to the flood emergency. Two helicopters used for the flood response have been relocated to Lamu, Kenya.

Internal displacement has been localized, with people moving within districts, seeking clan protection. Reportedly up to half the population of Beletwyne has fled the town. Large-scale movements are reported towards Galkayo in the North and Kismayo in the South. However, numbers have not yet been verified. Kenya is already hosting 35,000 new Somali refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is planning to meet with the Kenyan authorities tomorrow to discuss planning for an additional refugee camp in northern Kenya. Humanitarian agencies have received reports from young men fleeing Mogadishu that children are being forcibly recruited into fighting forces.

Security and access permitting, United Nations agencies and partner non-governmental organizations will attempt to build on the ongoing flood response to deliver assistance to new internally displaced persons and conflict-affected populations through national staff and local non-governmental organizations.

In a statement issued on 22 December, the Secretary-General strongly deplored the outbreak of fighting between the forces of the Transitional Federal Government and the Union of Islamic Courts. He expressed concern at the escalation of conflict in Somalia and its disastrous consequences for civilians, who are already suffering from the effects of years of instability and deprivation, compounded by the recent flooding. He called on the two sides to cease the hostilities immediately and to resume the peace talks initiated in Khartoum without delay and without any preconditions. The Secretary-General also expressed grave concern at the continuous reports of the involvement of foreign forces in the current conflict, and he implored all involved to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia. He urged all the countries of the region to do whatever they could to ensure that the parties return to the peace talks and pursue a negotiated settlement of the crisis.

On 26 December, the Secretary-General called the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and the President of

Kenya. He urged a cessation of hostilities in Somalia and reaffirmed that there is no military solution to the conflict. He also reiterated to the two leaders the need to encourage the Somali parties to resume peace talks without preconditions.

The League of Arab States has also issued an appeal, calling on the Somali parties to resume talks in Khartoum without any preconditions. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, expressed grave concern at the ongoing fighting in Somalia and reiterated his appeal for an immediate ceasefire. He also appealed to the Transitional Federal Government and the Union of Islamic Courts to resume peace talks in Khartoum without preconditions, under the auspices of the Arab League and IGAD. Mr. Konaré called for a meeting of the Arab League, IGAD and the African Union, which is scheduled for 27 December 2006 in Addis Ababa.

As the crisis escalated, I and other members of the international community have intensified our contacts with the two parties, encouraging them to avoid conflict and return to the negotiating table. In this regard, I visited Baidoa on 20 November and appealed to the Transitional Federal Government to maintain the unity of the Transitional Federal Institutions. This unity was undermined when differences emerged over what the Transitional Federal Government regarded as the unilateral decision of the Speaker of the Transitional Federal Parliament to visit Mogadishu to revive the dialogue. The Transitional Federal Government gave me assurances that it would heed my requests. On 4 December, I visited Mogadishu and met with the top leadership of the Union of Islamic Courts and appealed to them to return to dialogue without preconditions and to halt their military expansion. The leaders of the Islamic Courts said that they would give serious consideration to my requests. They also denied that they were harbouring international terrorist suspects and reiterated their invitation for an international fact-finding mission to visit Somalia and verify their claim. Nevertheless, in spite of my appeals to halt their expansion, militias of the Union of Islamic Courts moved unopposed into the town of Dinsor, 60 kilometres from Baidoa, on 5 December.

On 14 December, on the margins of the Second Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in Nairobi, I had contacts with a number of regional leaders on the situation in Somalia, as well as with Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. I also held meetings with senior representatives of a number of diplomatic missions in Nairobi on the implementation of resolution 1725 (2006).

On 19 December, the International Contact Group on Somalia met at the ambassadorial level in Nairobi to discuss the worsening situation on the ground. The Contact Group issued a statement calling on both parties to avoid further escalation through their statements, military action or expansion, and to resume direct talks without preconditions. In the statement, the International Contact Group also expressed its grave concern at the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia and reiterated the need for the parties to guarantee active support and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance.

On 20 December, Mr. Louis Michel, the European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian and Development Aid, visited Baidoa and Mogadishu and urged both parties to avoid conflict and resume dialogue. He also discussed the possibility of establishing the joint verification mechanism discussed during previous rounds of Khartoum talks. Mr. Louis Michel also presented the two sides with a draft memorandum of understanding on avoiding conflict and resuming dialogue, which has not been accepted by the two sides.

While neither side has completely rejected a return to dialogue, it has so far not been possible to reconcile the preconditions introduced by both parties for the resumption of the talks. It should be recalled that disagreements on various preconditions between the delegations of the Transitional Federal Government and the Islamic Courts resulted in the postponement of the third round of Khartoum talks in October.

I would like to conclude my briefing by urging Council members to call on the two sides to halt the fighting immediately and not to take any further provocative actions. All sides to the Somali conflict must also be urged to abide by the provisions of resolution 1725 (2006) and urgently return to dialogue, without preconditions. Unless a political settlement is reached through negotiations, Somalia, I am afraid, will face a period of deepening conflict and heightened instability, which would be disastrous for the long-suffering people of Somalia and could also have serious consequences for the entire region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Fall for his statement.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. I invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.